

Main Street Newton: A New Day, a Bright Future

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NEWTON — Within blocks of the celebration on Tuesday, workmen were continuing to revitalize an old building on Spring Street and bright pastel colored storefronts on two shops welcomed customers.

More than 50 people gathered on the Newton Green Tuesday afternoon at a "Coming Out Party" to celebrate the community support of the Main Street Newton Project.

The Main Street Newton Project was formed in an effort to revitalize downtown Newton and to receive a designation from Main Street New Jersey, which is a comprehensive revitalization program that promotes the historic and economic redevelopment of traditional business districts in New Jersey.

The assembly allowed members of the community to meet the New Executive Director of Main Street Newton, Carola Hartley, and hear her thoughts about Main Street Newton.

Main Street Newton Board of Trustees President John Vegas welcomed the crowd and thanked the community for their dedication to the project. "It is a very special day for Newton, he said. "The kickoff of a program to rebuild and to make downtown the hub of Newton," he said.

"Our community has donated in excess of \$120,000 toward the Main Street Newton Project," Vegas said.

Sussex County Freeholder Hal Wirths said, "I've been a freeholder for seven years and this is the first earmark I've put into the budget," he said of the \$20,000 the county gave to the project.

"It's a very very good day," Wirths said. "If this (the Main Street project) works we can use it in a Stanhope, in a Franklin, it can be shared with all of the people."

Sussex County Chamber of Commerce President Tammie Horsfield said "I'd like to congratulate Newton on taking next step on the rebirth of our town. I'm very, very proud of you," she said.

Horsfield said what made her most proud is the fact that the businesses and the town have worked together in order to make the project a success.

"Newton has the potential to become a vibrant and strong business center," Newton Mayor Thea Unhoch said. She explained that if Newton receives the designation it will give Main Street Newton the inside track on additional grant money.

Newton Chamber of Commerce President Dennis Becker echoed the sentiments of the other speakers when he said, "I'm very excited about what's going on, I want to see people coming down here instead of the mall."

Hartley, who has 20 years of Main Street experience said, "I think downtown Newton is a fantastic place."

"You have a great downtown, you all need to be proud of that," she said to the crowd.

The Main Street New Jersey program was established in 1989 to encourage and support the revitalization of downtowns throughout the state.

Every two years the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs accepts applications and designates selected communities to join the program. These communities receive valuable technical support and training to assist in restoring their Main Streets as centers of community and economic activity.

Unhoch said the state will choose only three communities for Main Street New Jersey. Newton's application is due Nov. 1. The community should know sometime in December if they receive the designation.

"We're going to be the best Main Street community in New Jersey," Hartley said as the crowd applauded.